



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Cholera

What is cholera?

Cholera (Kol-er-uh) is an illness caused by toxins from the *Vibrio cholerae* germ. These germs are mainly found in people, but may be found water where fresh and salt water mix (estuary or brackish water). Cholera is rare in the United States and is almost always related to travel to areas of the world where cholera is common.

What are the symptoms of cholera?

The symptoms begin within 2 to 3 days (range of a few hours to 5 days) and include:

- Mild to severe watery diarrhea ("rice-water stool")
- Vomiting
- Dehydration

The rapid loss of body fluids can cause dehydration and shock in the most severe cases. Without rehydration, death can result within hours.

How is cholera spread?

People become ill by contact with a sick person's feces or vomit, usually by food or water having raw sewage in it. Water with the germ can get in shellfish in the ocean and raw produce by washing with dirty water. Direct person-to-person spread is not likely. Germs may be present for several months in feces.

Who is at risk for getting cholera?

Anyone can become ill, but young children, senior adults, pregnant women, and immune suppressed individuals (such as patients on cancer drugs and with organ transplants) are at high risk for illness.

How do I know if I have cholera?

A person having profuse, watery diarrhea should consult a health care provider immediately. The health care provider may collect a stool sample to test.

How is cholera treated?

Cholera can be treated by fluids and salts lost through being ill. People can be treated with oral rehydration solution, a prepackaged mixture of sugar and salts to be mixed with water and drunk in large amounts. This solution is used throughout the world to treat diarrhea. Severe cases also require intravenous fluid replacement. Drugs shorten the course and make the illness not as bad, but they are not as important as rehydration.

How is cholera prevented?

In general, cholera can be prevented by practicing good hand washing, good food safety practices, and safe travel outside of the United States.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/cholera/index.html>.

Food and Drug Administration, Food Facts for Consumers:
<http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm077286.htm>

This page was last reviewed March 18, 2013.